

We have seen a letter in *The Mark Lane Express* of the 16th May last, addressed by Sir F. A. Mackenzie to The Royal English Agricultural Society, which we think is well deserving the attention of Agricultural Societies in British America. We have ever been of opinion that the chief object of Agricultural Societies should be to encourage the improvement of the cultivation of the soil, and the increase of its general production. The letter of Sir F. A. Mackenzie expresses our views on this subject, so fully and in so much better terms than we could make use of, that we beg to copy the greater part of the letter for the consideration of our Subscribers. We omit the two first paragraphs as they are not exactly applicable to this country:—

“With regard to the prizes offered by our society, I think a great improvement could justly be made in the selection. Will it not be allowed that the highest premium ought to be voted for what is most useful to the nation?

Does then utility guide the prize committee when fixing on the animal list of premiums? For instance let any unprejudiced person, casting his eyes over the list of premiums for 1841, and seeing only £10. awarded to Messrs. Skirving & Gibbs for their valuable display of roots and seeds, whilst £20. immediately follows for gorse-cutter, allowed by the judges to be by no means perfect,—would he call this a judicious distribution of our funds? What comparison can there be between the value of a Skirving Swede, to the nation, and a gorse-cutter—between a superior kind of turnip or grain calculated to increase largely the supply of food for human beings, or for our animals throughout Britain; and a cutter of gorse for horses and cattle only, and besides a thing out of any use, and never can be of any use to one out of a thousand of our farmers, I am decidedly of opinion, and I shall find every man of common sense agree with me in thinking, that the discovery of a superior, more prolific, or earlier wheat, or other grain, or a weightier and more nutritious root than any now known, would be of more value to our country, and I may say, to the whole world, for it could not be confined to Britain,—than all the gorse-cutters, nay, even than all the short-horns one hundred times over, that ever carried prizes at our national or local shows.—Yet how does the matter stand in the eyes of the prize selecting committee? Why, that £100. was given for short-horns, as premiums; £100. for Hereford's; £65. for Devon's; £145. for cattle of any kind; £155. for horses; £110. for Leicesters; £100. for Downs; £110. long-woolled sheep; £10. for extra stock; and only £30. for pigs, by far the most useful, and consequently valuable animal to the mass of the population; total for animals £915, and as I have already stated, for the roots and seeds on which those very animals wholly depended for their superiority, nay, for their very existence—ten pounds. Could, may I humbly ask, these cattle, sheep, &c., be produced in their perfect state, did not such men as Skirving, Gibbs, and others, exert all their talent in discovering roots and seeds, superior in quantity and quality as food for these very animals; and if £915. be devoted to the latter, what will any unprejudiced man say ought to be allowed for that which is the great source and cause of perfection in these animals? Why, £1000., I may say, £10,000. would not be beyond the bounds

of a fair proportion, could such a sum be afforded.

Besides this; a new and more valuable root, or new and more prolific kind of grain, is of importance to every man, woman, and child, fed within the boundaries of our isle—will spread its benefits over the whole country, and come into general use in the course of but a very few seasons; whilst the owners of first rate animals do all in their power, to keep their invaluable breeds wholly in their own hands, to prevent any competitors at our shows becoming successful rivals. In one hundred years give what premiums you like the Spencer blood of short-horns, or the Webb breed of Downs, will not be obtained by any great number of our breeders, nor by one in one thousand of our farmers, unless the premiums are given, on conditions which I am about to propose? Which then most deserves encouragement?

What I would suggest is this:—That the owners of prize animals should not be allowed to confine a valuable breed to their own farm-yard. I consider it the duty and great object of all our Agricultural Societies to study the general interests and welfare of the whole nation; not that of private individual breeders only—to see that all which has proved its superiority should as much as possible be spread over the whole country; and as the best means of so doing as regards animals, I propose making it conditional that no male animal shall be allowed to compete for a prize without producing a certificate that during the past year he has served such a fair proportion of females as may be fixed on, and that all farming prizes shall come under an obligation to serve a proper proportion of females during the rest of their lives for a moderate but a fair remuneration. The male produce too, of female prize animals ought to be kept entire, as a condition agreed on when receiving a premium, and what would still further tend to spread the best breeds over the whole country would be this—that all the males got by prize males should be kept by their owners, a thing easily arranged by making a condition when the females are served by a prize male. As to any security for the fulfilment of such conditions, let us rely on that honour which is the distinguishing mark of every true-born Englishman.

In addition to my proposed innovation, I would briefly suggest that instead of a premium being given commonly to the fattest animal exhibited, a strict inquiry should be made as to the expense of bringing it into that fatted state, and decided by a preference given to that animal or breed which has acquired the best condition on the poorest, cheapest fare. It can be of no value to the generality of our farmers, who look for their subsistence to the profits derived from their farms by judicious economy, to know that the wealthy expend a sum in preparing their stock for shows, double its value when exposed for sale; on the contrary, the really valuable gift to our nation would be those animals arriving at a state of perfection at the smallest expense, and such only ought to obtain premiums.

With regard to prizes, I would place a new, earlier, more prolific, better kind of grain, capable of been grown on inferior soil, as first in importance; since on grain depends the lives of nine-tenths of our immense population: and let it not be forgotten that one bushel of increased produce in grain over every arable acre in Britain, would add 1,200,000 quarters annually to our present corn crops. What object then deserves really the greatest encouragement?

The second place should be assigned to

new superior roots, grasses, or any kind of vegetable food.

Superior ploughs, a perfect dibbler, or other implements capable of performing the various operations necessary for tillage best, and at least expense, should decidedly in justice stand third—for their benefit would be felt speedily all over the country—and I do hope after the promise—shall I call it—given by The Royal Society to my application for a committee to decide the merits of various ploughs, and prove by repeated trials on various kinds of soil, which will perform the most and best work with the least draught. As to deciding by the necessarily brief trials at our annual shows, the thing is impossible; but let our Society call on so many willing to devote their time and talents to this most important object, and there will be want of hundreds ready to form a committee perfectly competent to decide the question, at furthest within six months of their appointment.

Discoveries of new and valuable economical manures, the destruction of the wire-worm—turnip fly, grub—and remedies for the many other evils which afflict the best agriculturists should come next, and not yield an importance to the all absorbing premiums for animals, which ought to stand fourth; though I fear that old habits and prejudices will yet for a while get the better of reason, and give them a higher place than I hope I have succeeded in proving them to deserve.

A large sum is annually devoted to premiums for essays on various subjects, but it may well be doubted whether they produce the beneficial results expected. * *

What we want is—what I proposed two years ago, but of course too new in idea to be complied with—a book on agriculture in all its branches, composed and selected from all that is best, published under the authority and sanction of a practical committee of our Society; with new editions every season or third year, omitting what becomes obsolete, and adding all that is new and really useful. Every man possessing twenty acres of land would read this and profit by it.

Last year I proposed that all the principal points of all the best and worst animals exhibited at our shows, should be written out by the judges, and for the information of the young agriculturists that attend our shows acquire instruction, placed as tickets on some conspicuous part of each animal.”

If the suggestions of Sir F. A. Mackenzie were attended to by Agricultural Societies in Canada, their usefulness would be greatly increased.

In the same number of *The Mark Lane Express*, from which we have copied the above, we find the following paragraph from an agricultural report for the county of Cornwall:—

“All intelligent farmers ought to unite in their experiments with these ends in view; and the knowledge which may be accumulated by the various farmers clubs might be communicated either directly to each other, or to the public through the press. It would probably be an excellent plan for a deputation from the various farmers' clubs in the county to meet once a year, and draw up a general report of what progress has been made, and result of any experiment that may have been instituted. Such a plan, we consider, would be of essential service to the progress of agricultural improvement.”